

DRAFT Terms of Reference for Leitrim RDP 2023-2027

Evaluation Committee

The following comprise the Terms of Reference for the Members, Standing Orders and Administration of the RDP 2023-2027 LEADER Independent Evaluation Committee. (IEC)

- Leitrim Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) will put in place the Rural Development Programme, RDP 2023-2027 LEADER Evaluation Committee. This was agreed at the LCDC Meeting in (insert date)

Terms of reference were drafted referencing regulations EC regulations included in the operating rule section x.X

Roles & Membership

1. The RDP (LEADER) Evaluation Committee for Leitrim is a group of "subject matter experts" whose knowledge, expertise and experience has been sought to contribute to the decision-making process of the LCDC regarding project applications.
2. The primary role of the RDP (LEADER) Evaluation Committee is to assess, review and evaluate all applications for funding and make recommendations to the LCDC regarding the awarding of grant aid under the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) 2023 –2027. This assessment and review process is both technical and practical; examining all of the issues required and defined by the programme operating rules, [c616615b47f54e2289a3ee583658297b.pdf \(assets.gov.ie\)](https://assets.gov.ie/c616615b47f54e2289a3ee583658297b.pdf) the regulation and all circulars etc.
3. The Evaluation Committee will be tasked with assessing all of the complete applications for the RDP LEADER funding in County Leitrim. In the first instance they will consider the eligibility of all elements of each project proposal as set out in the programme Operating Rules and any subsequent circular issued by DRCD related to amending or altering the ORs. They will examine all projects for the following elements and make judgements on them in forming a recommendation to the LCDC on the projects.
 - a. Contribution with the priorities and objectives of the Local Development Strategy
 - b. Deadweight-Is the proposed project capable of proceeding without LEADER Rural Development funding?
 - c. Displacement-does the project impact or potentially impact negatively in any way on other similar activities, groups, businesses or communities?
 - d. Viability-is the project viable in practical and financial terms in both the implementation and operational stages? Is the project action plan / business plan viable? Are the finances and projections realistic and are assumptions defined and reasonable?
 - e. Sustainability-Is the project sustainable in the short, medium and long term? Is there sufficient provision for running the project for staffing the initiative for follow up, etc.
 - f. Environmental impact climate change
 - g. Job creation and economic impact.
 - h. Value for money and reasonableness of cost of the proposed developments
 - i. Project specific issues, etc.

- j. Any and all other issues which are relevant to the programme.
4. Community Led Local Development CLLD is one of the key foundations of this RDP LEADER 2023-2027 programme so it is important that this is reflected in the constitution and in the make-up of the evaluation committee. CLLD constitutes a combination of representative and participatory democracy: an instrument that representatives of public administrations can use to collaborate in partnership with organised civil society and the public.
 5. With this in mind the members of the evaluation committee will be selected and nominations sought from a range of sectors, statutory bodies, stakeholder groups and representative organisations including the Leitrim PPN and including young people and women, Leitrim County Council, Leitrim Development Company, the tourism sector, the business / private sector, the farming pillar, and others etc. An evaluation committee should have at least 15 members available on the panel and who can attend for the evaluation role. Experience in the previous Programmes was that it was very often difficult to get the quorum of members together from a smaller panel in order to make valid evaluation recommendations. A quorum of 5 is required for valid recommendations.
 6. Suggested make-up of the Independent Evaluation Committee (IEC) as follows consideration for these
 - a. Leitrim County Council Executive 1
 - b. Leitrim Local Enterprise office 1
 - c. Leitrim PPN 5 (including youth <30, women, environment, social inclusion and C&V and ensure at least 1 from each MD)
 - d. Leitrim Development Company Board 1
 - e. Tourism sector possibly 2 (LTGA, Tourism network, Recreation Forum,)
 - f. Micro and SME sector 1/2 (town business / enterprise forums chamber of commerce etc)
 - g. Farming pillar 1
 - h. Financial / enterprise "subject matter expert" (accountant, bank manager, credit unions etc) from within the county 1 – 3 possibly 2
 - i. Previous Evaluation committee rep 1
 - j. Statutory sector (one of SMLLETB, HSE, DSP, Teagasc Etc) 1

It is vital that there is expertise from a social inclusion perspective and that environmental knowledge, understanding and expertise is included. The community and voluntary sector and young people must also be present as many of the applications will be from community & voluntary groups. Expertise to assess these LEADER projects should come from within the sector. The Leitrim Public Participation Network is the body which will be requested to seek and nominate such representative expertise. The PPN in Leitrim is now the natural representative of the various community and voluntary interest around the County and is recognized by the "putting people first" policy as the body to nominate and agree representatives to and for a wide range of local Government and other structures and agencies. The PPN should be asked to nominate 5 or possibly six representatives for the evaluation committee as follows 3 from the "colleges" (Social inclusion, community and voluntary and environmental), or one each from the municipal districts (MDs) and also one to represent women, and one to represent young people preferably someone under 30 (or a representative of young people) and one from the environmental college if the MDs are included represented.

A representative of the Local Enterprise office should be a member of the evaluation committee as this looks like a requirement from the Department to avoid duplication of effort and supports. It is also important that a representative from the implementing partner RDP staff sits on the LEO evaluation panel for the same reason.

The tourism sector has a number of participative groups and networks in Leitrim which could be asked to nominate a representative from the sector who has experience and expertise and is actively involved in a tourism businesses and the sector in the county.

Likewise the microenterprise and SMEs have a range of community based groups and networks locally which represent their interests such as the Carrick-on-Shannon Chamber of commerce, Mohill Business Association, Ballinamore Business Association, Manorhamilton Enterprise Forum and Leitrim Enterprise Network. They will be asked to select an agreed nominee between them.

The farming pillar will be asked to agree a nominating body for Leitrim and to select a local candidate for the evaluation committee.

Agreement on a statutory nominating body was also reached at the LCDC and a nomination sought. This statutory nominating body was agreed as the Department Of Social Protection by the LAG.

7. Public advertising for other "subject matter expert" may be considered as part of the process of establishing the evaluation committee. An open public call seeking interested parties with particular skills such as financial management, accountancy, banking, business development and analysis etc. should also be considered for one or two "expert" members.
8. The members should all be aware that the Evaluation meetings are very focused and technical issues relating to the assessment are very defined. There will be a significant volume of material including reports, project action plans and business plans to be read by the members in advance of the evaluation meetings. The meetings can be extensive particularly when there are numerous projects for assessment and all meetings will be held in the LDC offices in Drumshanbo. There is a considerable amount of work associated with membership of the committee and the members will be expected to commit to this. Confidentiality and discretion on the discussions, activities and recommendations of the committee are absolute in the process of evaluation and will be expected from committee members at all times. It is expected that the committee will meet monthly (apart from the month of August). With closed calls in the new RDP 2014-2020 there will be large volumes of project application at particular times of the years and more than one meeting in that month may be necessary.
9. It will also be important to consider bringing forward expertise / representation from the evaluation committee which existed from 2014 to 2022. There is a lot of knowledge and expertise within the membership of the evaluation committee from the 2014 -2020 Programme. The members of this committee are well aware of the requirements relating to assessing projects from a technical, financial and practical perspective and are familiar with the main body of the operating rules.

10. LEADER Evaluation Committee members are aware that the ultimate decision-making is the sole remit of the LCDC and its members. This applies in all cases, unless the LCDC exercise their right to delegate any authority on specific issues to the Evaluation Committee or as allowed in the operating rules etc. and as agreed by the LCDC.
11. Maximum membership of the RDP LEADER Evaluation Committee panel : 17 members, subject to the discretion of the LCDC.
12. The Chairperson for each meeting will be nominated from within the members of the evaluation committee who are present at each meeting.
13. Members of the LCDC shall not be members of the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) Evaluation Committee as set out in the Operating Rules. Retired or former members of the LCDC can be members of the IEC
14. The Evaluation Committee will have broad sectoral representation and a gender balance will also be addressed in its establishment by the LCDC.
15. As far as possible the membership of the Evaluation Committee should remain relatively stable for the period of the programme. This will help ensure consistency in its analysis, evaluations and recommendations and in its institutional knowledge and understanding of the RDP Programme, the operating rules and of the Leitrim LDS.
16. The LCDC reserves the right to appoint / remove members of the RDP (LEADER) Evaluation committee at any time.
17. The meetings tend to be during the working day although flexibility is included to ensure that a quorum is available. The meetings are generally online via the Teams platform and all of the necessary items including an Project plan or business plans, the scoring sheets, the project assessment reports, an agenda and minutes from the previous meeting etc. are provided to the members in advance.

Responsibility

1. The primary role of the LEADER Evaluation Committee is to evaluate applications for funding and make recommendations to the LCDC and / or to project applicants related to the awarding of grant aid under the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) 2023 –2027.
2. Reviewing progress, allocations and budgets for each strategic action as they relate to the evaluation process under the RDP and agreeing any action recommendations as appropriate or necessary.

Supports for the LEADER Evaluation Group

1. There will be a detailed induction for all members at commencement and a similar induction for new members as appropriate thereafter. Ongoing training and support to the Evaluation Committee will be provided as appropriate from the Leitrim Development Company RDP staff, Rural Development Operational Committee, the Leitrim County Council staff (incl LCDC executive staff) and the LCDC itself.

2. Dates and times for meetings will be agreed by the committee in advance at each meeting. Meetings will be timed and co-coordinated so as to adequately precede the meetings of the LCDC. Timings of meeting will also take consideration of closing of funding calls and of the Article 48 checks process.
3. Items for the agenda to be agreed by the previous meeting Chairperson with the RDP staff.
4. The Chairperson should allow adequate time for agenda items to allow for a thorough discussion on the issues and projects and also to ensure efficiency of meetings their timely progress and arrival at scoring and recommendations.
5. Project assessment reports, business plans, and other such details will be mailed or emailed as appropriate and as agreed with individual members of the Evaluation Committee at least three working days prior to meetings.
6. A quorum of 5 people (minimum) from the RDP (LEADER) Evaluation Committee must be present to score projects and to make recommendations to the Board.
7. If urgent matters require consideration the previous Chair of the Evaluation committee in consultation with the LDC RDP staff may call an "extra-ordinary" meeting outside that already scheduled or agreed.
8. Staff of the RDP lead implementing partner (Leitrim Development Company) will present the assessment reports, support and facilitate the discussions of the projects at the evaluation meetings. They will also complete minutes, document and report recommendations to the Board and make the necessary arrangements for the completion and compilation of scoring sheets.
9. Leitrim Development Company staff will co-ordinate and administer the activities of the Evaluation Committee and present all relevant information so that recommendations on projects are fully informed and that a recommendation on any and all projects can be made to the LCDC within a maximum of two evaluation meetings. These staff members play a key role in ensuring constructive Evaluation Committee meetings are held with good information and communication transfer.
10. LDC Staff will provide the secretarial / administrative service to the meetings for the purpose of recording and producing appropriate agendas, accurate minutes, records and reports, and compiling the scoring records etc.
11. Members must attend at least a minimum of three evaluation meetings per year and if unable to attend meetings should send formal apologies. Alternates could be considered in the process of appointing the committee and is a matter for consideration by the LCDC as appropriate.

Information

To operate effectively, the RDP LEADER Evaluation Committee will need to have a clear understanding of the following.

October 2023 draft pre programme opening

1. The details of the Leitrim Local Development Strategy (LDS) and of the needs of various sectors in County Leitrim
2. The themes, priorities and strategic objectives and levels of funding under each of the strategic actions in the LDS which are available to the LCDC under The Rural Development Programme, to address these needs.
3. The planned actions, within the RDP programme and particularly the Leitrim LDS to address the identified needs.
4. The Operating Rules and any associated guidelines, circulars, etc. from the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government for the Rural Development Programme (LEADER) (RDP).
5. The criteria for assessment of applications, applicants and projects and the scoring and process for making recommendation to the LCDC.
6. A broad understanding and knowledge of the various policies or procedures which the LCDC may agree from time to time in relation to the RDP. For example Tourism Policy, Festivals Policy, Procurement Guidelines, Application Handbook, Closed Calls Information, Sectoral Agreements, etc.

Confidentiality & Declaration of Interests.

1. The confidential nature of the RDP (LEADER) Evaluation Committee must be upheld and maintained by all members at all times.
2. In the first instance all members of the Evaluation Committee are required to complete a comprehensive register of their interests including membership of various groups, clubs, associations, directorships, businesses, and employment. This will be reviewed annually to update any changes.
3. Any member of the RDP (LEADER) Evaluation Committee who has an interest either directly or indirectly, in an application, item of discussion, project or connection with an applicant must declare their interest and absent themselves from the meeting while a discussion is ongoing and a scoring or recommendation is being formed.